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“MyManagement”: Women Managers in Gendered and Sexualised Workplaces

Abstract

Purpose

We report on research with women managers’ in which we document their strategies in response to gendered and sexualised working life. Our analysis offers a conceptual framework as well as suggesting ways in which employing organisations and workers might recognise and address the myriad forms of discrimination.

Design/methodology/approach

A qualitative design was pursued with 15 one-to-one interviews and two focus groups involving 12 women managers aged from their 30s to 60s. Data were collected in Finland. Women were recruited through business networks. Participants worked in a range of private sector and voluntary sector organisations.

Findings

Finland is a country which enjoys an international reputation for gender equality, but across our data women recounted numerous examples of how they navigate working life to manage sexualised and discriminatory encounters and comments. Women reported feeling under constant surveillance for their looks, dress, and behaviours in and outside the workplace. Further, ageing brought with it challenges to remain energetic and youthful and enhance the image of the organisation.

Originality/value

Although a considerable body of research exists on (gendered) aesthetic labor at work in service and hospitality work, there is a limited data on this in business and middle management. With an ageing workforce, and women continuing to encounter pressures with their physical appearance, behaviors and dress, they continually develop ways to negotiate their careers. We propose the concept of ‘MyManagement’ as a self-technology to denote the ways how women manage workplace relationships, working life, and career development as organisational practices remain gendered.

Key words: Women managers, aesthetic labour, age and ageism, gendered practices, compliance, resistance

Biographical notes

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“MyManagement”: Women Managers in Gendered and Sexualised Workplaces

Introduction

In this article we identify and analyse how women managers in Finland are encountering myriad sexualised and gendered behaviours in current workplaces and across their careers. Through our analysis of data from interviews and focus groups, we have developed the concept of “MyManagement” which encapsulates the varied and inter-weaving processes of women’sⁱ coping strategies and self-management. These include physical appearance, style of dress, physical demure and communication with male and female colleagues.

Women have high visibility and participation levels in Finnish politics (41.5% of Members in the Parliament in 2015), in higher education (60% of university degrees), participation in the labour market where women comprise nearly half of the workforce, with 82% of them working full-time (Statistics Finland, 2014). Among the European Union 27 member states, Finland has the largest share of employees with a female boss, at 39% in comparison to the EU average of 24% (Parent-Thirion *et al.*, 2007; Lehto, 2009). A shared value, thought to guarantee non-discrimination and equality in Finland, is that of gender-neutrality (Korvajärvi, 2011) and this is promoted through the monitoring of legislation and patterns in employment. Finnish organisations with 30+ employees must draw up an equality plan, documenting roles, wage levels and pay gaps for men and women. An employer is obliged to actively promote equality for all with the plan reviewed every other year. As in other EU member states sexual and gender-based harassment, and direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of gender or gender identity, is illegal in Finland (Equality Act, 1986/2014).

These apparent success stories are noted internationally and Finland has been ranked third in the Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2015). However, successes hide many inequalities. The labour market remains highly segregated in both hierarchical and vertical terms, and women continue to have the main responsibility for domestic and family work, especially care work (Author A, 2008). Further, there is a low take up of parental leave by fathers (under 10%), a persistent gender pay gap (17%), and career hurdles for women seeking senior roles in management and leadership. A rapidly ageing population and the long term economic consequences has led to national policy objectives of lengthening working life. This objective collides with ageism. In 2000, Finland’s incidence of age discrimination experienced by women was the highest among the EU-15 countries (Ilmarinen, 2005). In a recent survey age-based discrimination was experienced by young women 10% (young men 7%) and by older women 12% (older men 7%) (Pietiläinen ja Keski-Petäjä, 2014). Gendered ageism includes many body dimensions (Author A and B, 2012) and earlier research also indicates that women try to balance their careers across the triple jeopardy of gender, age and ‘lookism’ (see Granleese and Sayer, 2005; Author A, 2014).

This article opens with a discussion of the genesis and theoretical underpinnings of our concept of MyManagement. The study and data are then presented, and in the closing section we consider how women's experiences must be recognised, valued and addressed in further research and policy. We suggest that through the concept of MyManagement we might develop wider debates and encourage critiques of the myriad ways in which gender, age and class are brought into, and reinforced, through work.

Habitus and Doing Gender in Management Work

Our research design drew on the gendered and embodied nature of organisational life, in studies on professional women's bodies (Tretheway, 1999), the (re)embodied organisation (Styhre, 2004), bodies, surveillance and resistance in organisations (Ball, 2005), bodies in leadership (Sinclair, 2005), and headhunters' perspectives on the 'ideal' executive body (Meriläinen *et al.*, 2015). During both data collection and the theoretical development of this paper we recognised the multifaceted nature of the terms manager and management; including, a process, a group, an individualised and gendered experience. Women managers' appearance and behaviours are scrutinised and manoeuvred through a range of spoken and unspoken processes, and in ways that do not appear to impact on men to the same degree. Women are generally aware of these contradictions and challenges, and that at times they too are monitoring each other's appearance and behaviours. However, the gaze is predominately male and reflects the dilemmas posed by 'doing' gender in organisations.

In developing our theoretical framework we focus on aesthetic labour, which refers to managing of and (self-)control over appearance (for instance, Witz *et al.*, 2003). As part of the wage-labour exchange and as partners in a psychological contract, employees are expected to follow implicit or more explicit dress, appearance and behaviour codes of the organisation. Management may also intentionally mobilise aesthetic labour by enhancing employees to 'look good and sound right' (Witz *et al.*, 2003; Caven *et al.*, 2013). Suitable embodied performances and looks have been studied in service, retail and hospitality industries, including hotels, airlines and the retail sector, but less in areas of knowledge work (Helms Mills, 2002; Williams and Connell, 2010). One's appearance also impacts on the performance of embodied actions and impressions. Meriläinen *et al.* (2015) highlight the relevance of the embodied co-presence (energy, intensity), voice (toughness for men; charisma and warmth for women) and capability (fitness, physical condition) to construct the 'ideal' executive body. Regardless of progressive legislation and policies in Finland, the 'ideal' continues to be the male manager, as it is in many other countries and contexts (*ibid.*, Acker, 1990). We argue that embodiments and aesthetic labour are more central in managerial women's working life than has previously been understood.

We have also drawn upon feminist revisions of the work of Bourdieu (Adkins and Skeggs, 2004), and in particular how gendered practices are created and situated within cultural practices. Power, according to Bourdieu, is created across cultures, re-legitimised through the interplay of agency and structure which encompass habitual ways of thinking, acting and being; habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). Hexis is a component of habitus and this refers to the ways in which we stand, speak and present ourselves. This, combined with abstract habits, including perceptions of difference, classifications, and feelings, provide the foundations for habitus. Original habitus is based upon early family experiences and how a person is shaped across multiple contexts. Specific habitus is shaped by a particular field entered in adulthood, and in this example, a career in management. This would include taken-for-granted notions of

what is acceptable knowledge, skills, demeanour, mannerisms, and appearance; embodied cultural capital. In terms of agency, anyone entering a managerial career will be aware of the requirements and disposition required to pursue such a career or specific habitus.

Feminist scholars have critiqued and adapted the work of Bourdieu, revitalising his fixed notion of gender to enquire how specific habitus draw upon different ways of doing gender and gendered practices inherent in workplaces (Adkins and Skeggs, 2004; Huppatz, 2009; Miller, 2016). Lovell (2000: 25) asserts that 'femininity as cultural capital' is evident in women's experiences. Femininity signifies a recognisable set of workplace practices including nurturing of customers and colleagues, emotionality and people-focused relations and roles, concern about appearance and the gaze of others, especially male colleagues. As Huppatz (2009: 50) notes 'femininity is generalized as a female condition', and thus in the specific habitus of managerial careers women must engage in the 'field', namely the 'network of social relations that follows rules and regularities that are not directly explicit.'

Ridgeway (2011: 188) contends that 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) is commonly associated with femininity and that the core principle of gender hierarchy is 'transmitted forward into new forms of economic and social organization'. Thus even in times of notable economic transformation, women remain 'framed by gender' (Ridgeway, 2011), whilst men have fewer direct interests in changing the gendered system and practices of work. This as Collinson (2003:541) notes, can generate 'insecurities, ambiguities and multiplicities of workplace selves.' Women managers are both subjects and objects in the workplace, and live through the contradictions of apparent success along with the varied emotions of performing in organisations. As a result they may resist, conform or disguise themselves. The identities of women managers may be formed through regulation by organisations, managers and colleagues, including women co-workers, and across varied relationships. Organisations, societies, and working lives are socially constructed but at the same time women have levels of agency, albeit, constrained by a range of forces and factors (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

Within the work-place field, Shilling (2011: 339) contends that routine behaviours are 'modes of connection' shaping 'appearance, pleasures, pains and capacities in particular directions'. He goes on to note that through 'body work the minutiae of individual action with the 'structural' issues of society, culture and economy' connect. For Bordo (2003) the female postmodern body is the site of constant correcting, improvement and change, and contradictions. According to Evans et al. (2010: 116), in addition to the objectifying male-gaze in sexualised cultures, women also gaze at other women and themselves and participate in projection of neo-liberal, self-policing gaze. Further, as Alvesson and Willmott (2002: 635) comment "regulation may be pursued purposefully or it may be a by-product of other activities and arrangements typically not seen". Although women are growing in number in managerial roles they continue to be 'framed by gender' and their 'workplace selves' (Collinson, 2003: 541), which can simultaneously exhibit conformity, resistance, humour, insecurities and ambiguities.

The Study

This article draws from the empirical data gathered through fifteen semi-structured interviews, and two focus groups with 12 women. All data gathering activities were recorded, translated, and transcribed. Women managers were working in business organisations or non-

governmental organisations (NGOs). The youngest were in their 30s, and the oldest in their 60s. All women were highly educated: most had a university degree or the equivalent.

The data reading was interpretative and based on thematic analysis (Langdridge, 2004). All names are pseudonyms, and the names and details of organisations are also carefully hidden to guarantee the anonymity and confidentiality, as agreed in the research contract. Author B read the transcripts to develop an initial coding scheme and refined this through analytic conversations with Author A. Themes emerged on women's encounters with gendered and sexualised work-life. The coded themes were organised into three empirical sections which address how women use different coping strategies.

Encountering sexualised work-life

We open up the empirical sections through examples of sexualised work-life – such encounters were present throughout the data. Hillary, a mid-aged business manager, spoke about an incident in a work trip where a male superior from her previous workplace had commented on the 'sexy look' of her hair. She had found that unpleasant and confusing, and pondered on the borders of professional conduct.

Hillary: My earlier superior from [previous workplace] knocked on the [hotel room] door [without any warning] at eight o'clock in the morning... to my surprise and to drag me to a meeting... In the elevator I said that 'oh dear, in this hurry I didn't have time to comb my hair' ... [Then the ex-boss said not to worry], 'ruffled hair looks much sexier'... (Hillary, business manager, 42 years)

Many women managers reported inappropriate and unpleasant comments on women's appearances in everyday work in the office. Layla, a senior NGO manager talked about how (some) men managers openly evaluated women's looks, and, for instance, were critical about appearance of their subordinates and "enjoyed having a young and pretty assistant". She continued:

Layla: Many [men] talked about what kind of legs women have, or that, gee, she was looking really ugly. An assistant had to be good-looking and well-groomed. (Layla, NGO manager, 64 years)

Although Layla's example drew on comments about the bodies of other women, she found this disturbing and offensive. Sexist comments – a form of sexual harassment – can be interpreted as (men's) behaviour that enforces male-bonding and fraternity (see Collinson and Hearn, 1994). Like Layla, many women had found such laughs and comments upsetting and insulting. They had felt uncomfortable in, and after, experiences of sexual(ised) advances, proposals or comments by their superiors, colleagues or customers; but, none of them had made a formal complaint. Instead, the women built compliance and sidestepping strategies; dimensions of MyManagement. As part of this women managed their looks to ensure they did not come in for unwelcome advances whilst maintaining aspects of a 'female manager business look', such as the dark coloured, tailored skirt or trouser suit with neatly styled hair and not too much make up. Women also used polite but sharp or humorous responses. They shared experiences with other colleagues, through generating humour and mutual support to resist sexualisation and gender and age discrimination.

Under surveillance: to fit in

Pressures to be fit and be ‘good-looking’ were present throughout the data. NGO manager Lisa talked about how she felt that she lacked the “elegancy” and focus on appearance she felt was expected in her organisation. Business manager Irene described the ways in which she avoided unwanted attention.

Lisa: What bothers me in this organisation is that I am not so elegant [as colleagues]... I do not look like the photographs in women’s magazines. Sometimes I feel that I should be more presentable. (Lisa, NGO manager, 59 years)

Irene: When I was in my 30s and quite good looking, I focused on being very business-like and not coming across as flirtatious in any way to *avoid giving wrong signals*. (Irene, business manager, 64 years, emphasis ours)

In Lisa’s quote, appearance can be interpreted as physical capital (Bourdieu, 1986) which can also be converted into economic, cultural and social capitals. Work organisations may benefit from staff’s appearances and promote codes of dress and presentation as a part of branding the business. Appearance does reproduce inequalities and depending on the style of presentation this can lead to inclusion or marginalisation (Shillings, 2003). Further, both appearance and communication were monitored to ensure the ‘wrong signals’ were not given. As the data demonstrated, physical capital is evidently gendered, reflecting and recreating hierarchies in society more generally as well as in workplaces.

Some women thought that seniority would safeguard them from gendered and sexualised comments, as suggested by one interviewee:

Shellie: When I was young and possibly too good-looking with long hair and so on, it was disturbing to me that in meetings someone [men] could say [condescendingly] that “this pretty missus here”... (Shellie, NGO manager, 60 years)

Many women spoke of early years in work as an especially difficult time for both learning about appearance and communication whilst trying to develop their career. In Shellie’s case, (‘feminine’ and nice) appearance, (women) gender and (young) age had impacted on her credibility amongst male colleagues and potentially her confidence. Normative femininity in business cultures builds on heterosexuality, attractiveness, being white, and not being physically disabled. These characteristics draw on western(ised) and commercialised beauty ideals, such as being slim with a youthfulness/agelessness look (Bordo, 1993; Shilling, 2003; Evans *et al.*, 2010). Gendered ageism is an issue at different ages and career stages for women managers, and we reported on this in earlier work (Author B, 2014; Author B and A, 2012).

Careful balancing of a ‘proper’ dress which signals professionalism was noted on a number of occasions. This echoes Trethewey’s (1999: 443) study where women talked about the fine line of dressing up; “women must reveal their bodies in very specific and specialised ways”. To reveal too much or to emphasise particular aspects of their bodies resulted in dire consequences, such as the loss of credibility, flirtation, or sexualised comments and looks (ibid.). The responsibility to ‘fit in’ becomes an individualised and complex task for women in organisations.

In focus group one, where the participants were business managers in their mid-30s to early-40s, these issues were discussed with a light tone:

Hazel: I've not got any [negative] comments on looks, perhaps the other way round (*laughs*) as last week we went to [company name] and I was wearing a skirt and blazer business suit. Then the others asked me 'are you going to a party tonight?' as I had that suit on and probably had even washed my hair in the morning...

(*Laughter*)

Beatrice: So positive comments, yes...

Nicola: Oh yes, oh yes!

Although the comment on Hazel's appearance was seemingly positive, the question "are you going to a party tonight" also reminds us that her dress generated a query about life after work. Dress codes for men can also be complex, but women inhabit a gendered and sexualised world in which their surveillance requires careful management lest they be blamed for unwanted attention or become the focus for unwelcome advances. The query about Hazel's evening illustrates the fuzzy boundaries between work and private life, in a potentially intrusive manner. Women spoke of questions about their care and domestic life and of the ways in which all aspects of their lives were under scrutiny.

A number of women also encountered pressures from other female colleagues; "defining a person by defining others" (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002: 629). Lisa, a senior NGO manager summarised these issues: "The looks is a fascinating issue as women often talk about dressing up for other women". Trethewey's (1999: 445) study indicates that women may actively discipline other women and their embodiments and that the 'female' gaze can be an equally powerful and conforming force (also Evans *et al.*, 2010). Another example of a critical gaze on other women was snorted by Elisabeth:

Elisabeth: When I think about some younger women subordinates, some wear such heavy make-up and their hair is so [raises hand to represent untidy hair] that I think that oh gee, how could a person who looks like that be suitable for a [senior] job! (Elisabeth, NGO manager, 59 years)

Most of the challenging comments about physical appearance were made by male colleagues and customers although other women could put pressure on women managers to conform to certain appearances and behaviours. Women's coping strategy of compliance and sidestepping enabled them to avoid unpleasant situations. Dressing in 'business-like' styles, appropriate to the sector, eased pressures. Women spoke of how they interpreted societal and business cultures to identify and follow both the openly recognised ways to behave and appear as well as the covert codes and instructions necessary to fit in as a woman in management. In engineering companies the dress style was pseudo-masculine whilst in NGOs it was important to be smart but not look overtly well off by wearing designer labels.

Search for youthfulness and ageless 'beauty'

Under panoptical gaze which controls and sets the norms for 'unruly' bodies, women themselves used manifold self-disciplinary technologies to keep up with expectations (Foucault, 1988). A major issue was the pressure to be "slim and well-groomed" and look youthful or ageless (see Bordo, 1993).

Sara: ...and there was discussion on the appearance, beauty and cosmetic surgery... and how also women themselves set such beauty criteria, but the outside world expects

[women managers] to be slim and well-groomed... It is also a question of age as a woman is good only when young and pretty... (Sara, business manager, 56 years)

Youthfulness was interpreted to be a personal merit, although it was recognised that to keep up the appearance demands a lot of effort. Elisabeth seemed very pleased to hear comments on her youthful looks:

Elisabeth: Just lately a lady approximately the same age as myself commented to me that ‘oh dear, you look so good... How can you look so good given we are the same age?’ (laughing)... [At work] I wear classic and youthful things. (Elisabeth, NGO manager, 59 years)

Ageing and its physical marks were a concern for many interviewees, already when they were relatively young. For a business manager Viola, it was “terrifying to look at [herself] in the mirror in the mornings”, in particular before she had put on her make-up. Viola continued:

Viola: I have horror scenarios for the moment when I start to hear comments [on ageing]. It will be really terrible... It will be really tough. ... Still now I think that the outward appearance is not necessarily equivalent to how one’s face looks (laughs). Wrinkles do not stop you having an enthusiastic appearance... I believe that you can create an impression, whether to be youthful or old and tired... (Viola, business manager, 44 years)

Viola’s extract reveals how commenting on a women’s age and how she ages might be considered a normalised behaviour in organisations that is inevitable; Viola talks in terms of “when I start to hear comments” rather than *if* that happens. Her comments capture how critical reflections on ageism can glide into a discourse of active conformityⁱⁱ.

There are double-standards of age/ing – one for women, one for men: “It seems to be typical that old grey eminent men are looked at differently than grey old women”, said Viola, and this was echoed by Sara and Beata:

Researcher: Right... so it [age and beauty standards] is not the same for both [genders]?

Sara: No it is not. (Sara, business manager, 56 years)

Beata: Is it so that when men get older they [are thought to be] even better looking and stylishly grey. But for older women, when they look different than they used to, then a kind of a feeling of inferiority becomes present.... (Beata, business manager, 44 years)

Individualised duties to be presentable and ageless require continuous time investments which is a challenge in managerial positions, in particular with gendered care responsibilities for families, friends and elderly relatives (Authors A and B, 2013). The sexualised and reproductive bodies of women gain physical capital but this declines with ageing and the menopause, reflecting patriarchal ideologies and practices (Skeggs, 2004). Thus the value of older women’s bodies evaporates with ‘losing’ reproductive capability. Physical capital requires constant sustenance by work-out, training, dieting, expensive cosmetics, and facial and body treatments (see Shilling, 2003). These demand an investment in time and money and create physical and psychological pressures. To sustain a youthful “impression” was interpreted as the duty of the women managers which merges across gender and

organisational hierarchies. As a result, women engaged in anti-ageing in order to conform to aesthetic requirements. These pressures may lessen as men become more concerned about appearance (or increase on both women and men), but for now it is evident that women are managing multiple agendas through constant revisions within the framework of MyManagement.

Rebelling with vigour and humour

Although sexualised work-life encounters and embedded beauty standards were often dealt with by sidestepping and compliance strategies, there were also examples of resistance in which women reacted with vigour, strength and wit. One example is from Beata, a business manager in her mid-forties, who described how she had encountered many sexualised comments during her career in a male-dominated business area. Then a sexual advance during business negotiations got Beata to react:

Beata: And I remember one night when [name] said to me ‘I have ordered us beers in my hotel room’. I told him ‘well, good for you, then you have two beers to drink up!’ (*with a very determined voice*). (Beata, business manager, 44 years)

Beata continued that “it was quite unpleasant the next morning to start business negotiations with him in a conference room”. However, she reported that her assertive and witty response to his advances had an empowering impact on her.

Lisa joked about her appearance, but also took the position that she was not willing to surrender to the unending search for a particular kind of looks in order to please her organisation and others:

Lisa: I am not a jacket suit feminist and cannot lengthen my legs... although I could lose some weight (*laughs*)... Unless this organisation pays a cosmetic surgery for me, then I look like I do! (Lisa, NGO manager, 59 years)

However, even Lisa could not totally resist embedded norms of weight and shape through laughingly commenting she “could lose some weight” and might even consider cosmetic surgery if the organisation paid that. A further example of using humour to resist was in focus group two. Kathleen, 34-year business manager talked about the ‘right’ business dress code:

Kathleen: I went to a meeting [organisation], and I had bicycled there. In the elevator I still wore my bicycling shoes, even had the click pedal on. I think I even tried secretly to sniff to see if my armpits were sweaty (*laughing*)... [Her boss enters the elevator and looks at her suspiciously] Then afterwards my then boss gave me feedback on what business dressing is about...

(*Giggling in the group*)

Mandy: Oh dear oh dear, bicycling shoes...

Women laughed joyously at the incident and shared similar experiences. Yet this is a paradoxical situation given employees are encouraged to exercise to keep fit, and for women there is also the pressures to manage weight, shape and sustain youthful looks. Resistance offers the potential to deconstruct the ‘set’ beauty standards and behavioural patterns suitable for managers. Although many women had taken the initiative to rebel against demands to be

‘feminine’, generally through humour or witty remarks, many expresses hesitation as mindful resistance is not an easy option, in particular without support from superiors and colleagues.

Discussion and Conclusions

Drawing upon our analysis we identified three strategies that women employ to navigate the gendered and sexualised work-life contexts:

- Compliance and sidestepping: for example, Irene spoke of her strategy to be “very business-like and not to be flirtatious”, and Hazel spoke of how she reflected on meetings and context, and dressed in ways she felt fitted in to being business-like. Thus, women tried to avoid unwanted sexual(ised) advances by controlling of their own behaviour and looks, and to fit in with assumed or outspoken expectations.
- Engaging in anti-ageing: A number of comments were made about looking good for one’s age (Elisabeth) or fearing comments of ageing (Viola). Women participants considered their looks, bodies and embodiments self-critically and were prepared to invest in keeping up youthful/ageless appearances.
- Resistance: At times women built up witty counter-comments and shared these with other women with humour and were empowered by support of others. Beata shared her story of the sexual advance made by a male colleague who told her that he had “ordered us beers in my hotel room” and how she retorted “then you’ll have two beers to drink up!” However, no one registered a formal complaint.

These strategies are not mutually exclusive and women can employ humour (resistance) as they conform, and at the same time develop strategies to slow the signs of ageing. Our data reveal interconnections between reflections of (masculine) dominant schemes of normalisation, partial conformity and occasional moments of resistance. MyManagement is a concept which can offer a way into analysing and working towards equality and diversity in workplaces. The strategies identified in our data are summarised in Table 1. The impact of the first two strategies could be said to stabilise an organisation’s gendered approaches to bodies and behaviours, and the third strategy of resistance comprises elements of change, challenge and empowerment.

- Table 1 here -

These coping strategies are dynamic and interweaving, and women in this study were very aware of the interplay and how they must traverse the gendered world of MyManagement. Sex and sexualities were clearly present in organisations and in women managers’ working life – sometimes as a positive undertone, but often as a destructive surge that had damaging impacts on women’s careers and other aspects of life. The first two strategies are individualised techniques which are based on the existing beauty/body norms and take assumptions of gendered and sexualised work-life as given. Women may feel embarrassed or suspect that they might themselves be at least partly ‘guilty’ for improper sexualised comments they encounter because of their own actions, and are hesitant to take up the issues as sexual harassment with their superiors or labour union representatives. Individualising sexual harassment and configuring that as a women’s ‘fault’ prohibits valorising the structures and processes behind the actions. The third strategy of resistance lies more on turning the unfair or unpleasant situation into an empowering experience. However, this more

rebellious strategy is still relatively reactive, unless more collaborative policies and practices are built up and their implementation followed systematically.

There is an obvious lack of pro-active strategies which women can use to challenge company policies. Laws on harassment and discrimination exist but women are reluctant to resort to formal action partly due to general pressures of time, work and family, but also the consequences of being labelled a trouble maker. Finland is at the forefront of legislation and policies, and regardless, women managers are in the midst of the MyManagement habitus. Women are aware of, and at times challenging, ‘masculine’ work ideologies, whilst trying to keep up with accepted aesthetics and representations of ‘feminine’ identities in management. Our data demonstrate that the implementation of comprehensive legislation in Finland is poor. A commitment on the part of business organisations, small and medium sized business (the majority of businesses in the EU) owners, government, managers and workers, is necessary to ensure that the legislation is enacted. The current long-term economic slowdown is a challenging context to the implementation of business and government equality plans and legislation.

We offer the concept of MyManagement asserting this encapsulates the varied and inter-weaving processes of coping strategies and self-management; physical appearance, style of dress, physical demure, interactions with male and female colleagues, as well as work and family activities. Women develop an understanding of MyManagement, drawing upon experiences over formative and working years in gender-segregated education processes, labour markets and workplaces. By the time women achieve a managerial role they are well aware of the consequences of challenging assumed notions of femininities and femaleness in the workplace. Women in this study spoke of their everyday experiences of MyManagement as largely taken for granted. At times women challenged the gendered workings of MyManagement but more often than not, they acquiesced to what was viewed as inevitable and insurmountable in the daily grind to achieve reasonable working relations and progress careers. In summary, women’s awareness of the gendered nature of workplaces, the implications of these for careers and lives outside the office, results in their learning of, and daily working with, MyManagement.

In this article we have focused on managers in relatively secure jobs working in a country with sophisticated policies on equality. Our data is drawn from women in mid to late career, and in the Finnish context this is a relatively homogenous group. Thus the reader might expect more progress on these issues with women anticipating promotion on the basis of their experience and skills. However, that is not always the case. MyManagement generates and promotes a kaleidoscopic lens on women as they move across locations and roles, as a manager, a mother, a partner, a sister and a friend, and working in single or mixed sex contexts. This is both an additional burden to women managers, but it also offers mechanisms for coping. The operation of MyManagement is premised upon masculine notions of being a manager and how men and women perceive leadership (Collinson, 2003). What we know from our analysis of this data is that gendered ideologies and practices are evident in all aspects of work-life, and MyManagement presents a further dimension – or frontier – in women’s managerial careers. MyManagement is not totally negative, although individualistic. Being aware of, and talking about MyManagement, offers opportunities for women to voice frustrations and secure support among co-workers, women’s networks and families. MyManagement is a discursive position available to women and our paper contributes to theoretical discussion on gendered bodies, behaviours and working relations in management and organisations.

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ⁱ We are aware that the categories of 'women' and 'men' have their limitations – further genders exist too (for instance, Mikkola, 2016). In this paper we focus on a particular group, namely women in management positions. Mikkola, Mari, "Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring, 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/feminism-gender/>>.

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Table 1. MyManagement Coping Strategies in the Workplace

Coping strategy	Compliance and sidestepping	Anti-ageing	Resistance
Aim	To fit in	To keep up	To be released from
Rationale	Refraining from unpleasant situations; avoidance strategy	Individualised duty to stay youthful; mixed avoidance/(individualised) approach strategy	Setting of borders, empowerment; approach strategy
Activity/level	Passive/personal	Active/personal	Active/shared concern
Impact on corporeality	Status quo	Reconstruction	Potential for challenge, deconstruction